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Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire

Summary

The present report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). It is presented to the Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as the first country report from Côte d'Ivoire from the monitoring and reporting mechanism referred to in paragraph 3 of that resolution. The report, which covers the period from January 2005 to September 2006, specifies the grave violations perpetrated against children in Côte d'Ivoire, particularly the killing and maiming of children, rape or other instances of grave sexual violence, especially against girls, and the abduction of and trafficking in children. The report highlights in particular ongoing conflict among ethnic groups and communities, which is having a severe impact on the lives and well-being of children and preventing the voluntary return of internally displaced persons to their homes. The report also highlights the progress made in dialogue with parties to the conflict and outlines the consequent action plans of the Forces nouvelles and four pro-Government militia groups in western Côte d'Ivoire to end the use of child soldiers and release all children associated with their forces. The report stresses the responsibility of the Government and the Front populaire ivoirien to support the United Nations in the identification and establishment of similar dialogue with all other militia groups. It also highlights the follow-up and programmatic response to violations.

The report recommends targeted action and measures against parties and individuals that systematically commit grave violations against children and rigorous and timely investigation and prosecution by relevant authorities of incidents of grave violations against children to address the prevailing culture of impunity. It also calls upon the international community and donors to provide timely and adequate assistance for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for all children associated with fighting forces in the country to ensure the long-term sustainable success of such efforts.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, covering the period from January 2005 to September 2006, is prepared in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) focusing on six grave violations against children in situations of conflict: (a) the recruitment and use of child soldiers; (b) rape and other sexual violence against children; (c) the killing and maiming of children; (d) the abduction of children; (e) attacks against schools or hospitals; and (f) denial of humanitarian access for children. The report identifies the principal parties to conflict and illustrates progress made in the dialogue towards the establishment of action plans to end violations. It also illustrates programmatic responses to violations in support of affected children in Côte d'Ivoire.

II. Political, military and social developments in Côte d'Ivoire

2. The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire began in 2002 with a military coup that led the country to be divided into two territories separated by a buffer zone, or "zone of confidence". The weeks of fighting and sporadic violence that followed cost many lives and left thousands of children orphaned. The south of the country remains under the control of the Government, while the north has been seized by the opposition, known as the Forces nouvelles. The zone of confidence falls under the authority of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the French forces, Licorne. The Security Council, in its resolution 1633 (2005), established an International Working Group mandated to promote regular dialogue and broker a lasting peace among the various Ivorian political elements factions. In the same resolution, it also called for the nomination of a prime minister to be entrusted with the responsibility of leading the identification and disarmament process and organizing general presidential elections by the end of October 2006. However, the elections are delayed owing to meagre progress made in the preparations as a result of continuous disagreements between the various parties to the conflict. To date, the two major challenges to the peace process remain the identification and registration of a large proportion of the population and the disarmament of armed groups. The national demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programme expects to benefit an estimated 2,000 armed militia men and women in the west (Guiglo), 4,000 soldiers from the Government regular army (Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire — FANCI) recruited after 19 September 2002 and 38,000 elements of the armed forces of the Forces nouvelles (FAFN). In addition, it has been estimated that 3,000 children are associated with FAFN and 1,000, with militia groups. The prevalence of weapons continues to translate into a high degree of insecurity throughout the country.

3. Children represent a large proportion of the population of Côte d'Ivoire. In its initial report submitted in 2000 to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire indicated that children under 15 years of age represented almost half the total population, or 48.2 per cent, in 1993; individuals under 20 accounted for 56 per cent. This high proportion of young people places a heavy burden on the education and health care systems. Since the start of the conflict in 2002, thousands of families have fled their homes because of conflict, including intermittent ethnic violence fuelled by xenophobia, land disputes and political affiliation. In territories under the control of the Government, a study

conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2005 estimated that there were 709,377 internally displaced persons in five regions of the country: Abidjan, Daloa, Duékoué, Toulépleu and Yamoussoukro. It is estimated that 51,037 of them are children who were born after their parents were displaced. The internally displaced persons often express reluctance to return to their villages for fear of attacks.

4. Children continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, which effectively denies them access to basic rights and needs such as education, health care and adequate nutrition, and increases their vulnerability to being exposed to violence and other abuse. The situation is worse in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles, where in the wake of the conflict teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and other civil servants fled to the south of the country. The collapse of the health and educational infrastructure in the north has devastating consequences for children. Many children in those areas have not taken exams since the beginning of the war, which has seriously undermined their ability to progress in their education and lives. It is only in 2006 that the administration of exams has once again been possible in the north, as a result of concerted advocacy by the United Nations. An acute shortage of adequate staffing and equipment persists in the health sector. The conflict has contributed to high levels of poverty, trauma and family breakdown, which have had a significant impact on children, including an increase in the number of children living on the street and engaged in prostitution in Abidjan, Bouaké and other cities. Furthermore, child labour and the number of orphaned and other especially vulnerable children have increased as a direct consequence of the conflict.

5. Access to the affected children by United Nations agencies is generally unimpeded, except in areas where unpredictable hostilities and violence may periodically break out. For example, in the western town of Guiglo, service delivery for children was hampered for several months owing to the violent incidents of January 2006, when United Nations personnel were evacuated following an attack on United Nations peacekeepers by a large crowd that included children. Reportedly, five Ivorian nationals were killed in the incident, including two children aged 14 and 16 years. An investigation by the United Nations is in progress to establish the cause of death.

6. The United Nations continues to express deep concern over the use of children as human barricades to impede the access of United Nations peacekeepers during episodes of violence, particularly in territories under the control of the Government. On 26 July 2005, in the aftermath of the attacks of Agboville and Anyama, a large organized crowd, including several children and women with babies on their backs, blocked a UNOCI military convoy at Petit Yapo, preventing access to these areas. Children involved in such situations often run the risk of being injured or killed.

III. Incidents and trends of grave violations

7. In Côte d'Ivoire children are exposed to a number of grave violations, including killing or maiming, recruitment and use as child soldiers, rape and other grave sexual violence, particularly against girls, abduction and attacks against schools or hospitals. Of particular concern has been the upsurge of rape and other sexual violence against children and women, with perpetrators often getting away

with such crimes unpunished. There are no reliable data reflecting the full scale of violations, and relatively few cases are investigated by the authorities, largely because of the prevailing sense of impunity of perpetrators.

8. Of grave concern is the level of violations and impunity in areas controlled by the Forces nouvelles, where there has been no administration of justice since the beginning of the conflict. The United Nations has been alarmed particularly at the large number of children subjected to detention, often illegal, and to the grave risks of abuse of children under such circumstances.

A. Recruitment and use of child soldiers

9. Children are associated with armed forces and groups both in the Government-held territories and in areas under the control of FAFN. In my report on children and armed conflict of 9 February 2005 (A/59/695-S/2005/72), I cited the release of 273 children by FAFN, which was listed in the report for the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

10. There is currently no tangible evidence of children participating in the Government's regular armed forces (FANCI). It is evident, however, that children are associated with armed militia groups close to the ruling party, the Front populair ivoirien (FPI). These militias are active in areas under the control of the Government, notably in the west, where the following four groups have been identified: Front pour la libération du grand ouest (FLGO), Alliance patriotique du peuple Wé (APWE), Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest (UPRGO) and Mouvement ivoirien de libération de l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire (MILOCI). Both FAFN and pro-Government militia groups in the west deny the recruitment of child soldiers. However, they admit to the association of children with their fighting forces.

11. Since the adoption by the Security Council in July 2005 of resolution 1612 (2005) and the concerted advocacy of the United Nations for dialogue and action plans to end the recruitment and use of children in the framework of the resolution, FAFN and militia groups have signalled their willingness to cooperate in this regard. Since July 2005, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its implementing partners have reported the demobilization of 327 children associated with fighting forces in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles, of which 251 were officially handed over to the United Nations by FAFN. In addition, 600 self-demobilized children in Danané, who received military training from pro-FAFN Liberian fighters during the conflict, and 400 children formerly associated with militia groups in the west have been identified for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Although no exact figures of the total number of children associated with FAFN are available, a caseload of approximately 4,000 children was estimated. United Nations monitoring and verification over the past year indicates that active recruitment of children by FAFN is not occurring and that measures are being put in place to identify children associated with their forces for handover to the United Nations. At this time there is no specific information regarding ongoing active recruitment of children by pro-Government militias, owing in part to access restrictions.

B. Killing and maiming of children

12. Many children were killed in the weeks of fighting between FANCI and FAFN in November 2002. However, most of the children who have been killed or maimed in the conflict have died either during clashes among the various ethnic groups or in politically or criminally motivated acts and episodes of violence. It should be stressed that the ongoing conflict in Côte d'Ivoire does not absolve State and non-State actors of their legal obligation under humanitarian law to protect children from killing, maiming and other grave violations.

13. Of particular concern is the killing and maiming of children in the context of inter-community violence fuelled by disputes over land ownership or political affiliation, particularly among the Guéré, Dioula and Baoulé ethnicities in Fengolo, Diahouin, Toazeo, Guitrozon, Duékoué and other villages in the west. These are located in territories under the control of the Government and in the zone of confidence. Several episodes of violence among these communities have taken place since the start of the conflict, during which houses and other property were destroyed and many individuals, including children, were killed. The UNOCI Human Rights Division reported allegations of infiltration into the zone of confidence by militia groups in the west (APWE, UPRGO and FLGO) in support of the Guérés while elements of FAFN support the Dioulas. The following cases reflect trends of killing and maiming of children:

(a) On 21 April 2005 several unidentified assailants executed a family from the Yacouba ethnic group in Petit Logouale zone of confidence. Two children, a boy and a girl, and their father were killed with a machete, and their mother was shot dead;

(b) On 1 June 2005 unidentified assailants attacked the villages of Guitrozon and Petit Duékoué, inhabited mainly by the Guéré ethnic group. It is reported that 41 individuals, including 3 babies, were killed in one house; the stomach of a pregnant woman was slit open with a machete in Guitrozon; and several houses were set on fire with their occupants, including children, still inside. In the aftermath of those attacks, on 6 June 2005 seven individuals from the Dioula ethnic group, including four children, were reportedly executed in the borough of Latif and Cokoma by unidentified assailants;

(c) On 16 April 2006 the Ghanaian battalion escorted the United Nations police to the village of Bania in the zone of confidence, where community members identified an individual accused of killing two children in activities related to sorcery;

(d) On 28 June 2006 six persons, including a 1-year-old child, were killed by unknown assailants in the village of Boho, 29 kilometres from Bangolo. This attack followed the discovery of the corpses of two children of Burkina Faso on 24 June 2006 in the village of Duekpé.

C. Abduction of children

14. The abduction of children in Côte d'Ivoire remains a serious concern, often believed to be related to the issue of child trafficking. Although this linkage and the scale of the problem has not been sufficiently documented, it is believed that the

climate of conflict and insecurity and the deterioration of social and administrative structures has rendered children more vulnerable to abduction and trafficking. Some reports suggest the involvement of networks of organized criminals involved in the trafficking of children into Côte d'Ivoire from neighbouring countries or abducting children from different parts of the country for forced labour in cacao plantations or mines or to be used as prostitutes or domestic servants.

15. The following cases reflect trends of abduction against children:

(a) On 15 June 2005 a 12-year-old girl was abducted in Korhogo (northern Côte d'Ivoire) and taken to Mali where she was forced into marriage. The father of the girl reportedly travelled to Mali to collect the girl but was threatened by her abductors and the husband, who told him he would be arrested by the Malian authorities if he did not leave the country;

(b) In April 2006 an 8-year-old schoolboy was abducted in the Government-controlled Marcory district of Abidjan. His eyes were removed in what is suspected to be a ritual practice. The case is still pending investigation;

(c) In July 2006 the national gendarmerie based in Government-held Agboville arrested a number of individuals believed to be part of a network involved in the trafficking and sale of children. Three alleged female perpetrators were apprehended in the operation with four abducted children between the ages of 2 and 5 years in their custody. Following an investigation, the gendarmerie arrested an adult male, the alleged mastermind and ringleader of the network. The case is pending trial.

D. Attacks against schools or hospitals

16. There is a lack of precise records of attacks against schools and hospitals, although it is known that several schools and medical centres were destroyed in the course of the hostilities between FANCI and FAFN and during the inter-community fighting that followed. The regional health centres of Danané, Man and Bouaké suffered major damage. With the exception of the French school, which was specifically targeted and ransacked by the Young Patriots in Abidjan in November 2004, schools and medical centres have generally been destroyed during the conflict as part of indiscriminate attacks rather than as a result of systematic targeting. It should also be noted that many of those facilities have become dilapidated owing to lack of maintenance or abandonment following the mass displacement of populations to safer areas. This has been especially evident in the west of the country.

17. The seizure and forceful occupation of schools is of concern. On 12 June 2006, more than 100 individuals of a pro-Government militia group known as the Groupe des patriotes pour la paix (GPP) occupied the Centre d'écoute pilot d'Adjamé, a children's centre in Abidjan. The occupation lasted until 17 June, when the national gendarmerie intervened following strong condemnation and concerted United Nations advocacy. No children were found on the premises at the time of the seizure, and no injury or loss of life was reported.

18. It should also be noted that the Ministry of Family and Social Welfare reported that the GPP militia group in 2003 had also occupied l'Institut de formation d'education feminine, a vocational training centre for girls and young women in

Adjamé. The occupation lasted through 2005, when the Government regular army, FANCI, evicted GPP and took over the premises. The Centre has since served as a military base pending its restoration as a school.

E. Rape or other grave sexual violence

19. The prevailing insecurity and the deterioration of social and administrative infrastructure as a result of the conflict have contributed significantly to high levels of sexual violence against girls and women in Côte d'Ivoire. The climate of impunity for crimes of sexual violence has also exacerbated the problem. Furthermore, programmatic interventions for affected children are hampered by the lack of reliable data on the full scale of such violations.

20. Between May and July 2005 the UNOCI Human Rights Division recorded incidents and reports of approximately 200 cases of sexual violence against children and women, with 41 per cent of the cases involving alleged rape. A 2005 UNFPA study established that 31 per cent of the girls interviewed admitted to having been forced or coerced into non-consensual sexual relations. Meanwhile, such factors as poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities have resulted in many girls becoming engaged in prostitution as means of survival.

21. A number of reports have established the existence of child-trafficking networks for the purpose of prostitution, operating in several locations in both FAFN-controlled areas (Vavoua) and the zone of confidence, as well as in Abidjan, Daloa, Yamoussoukro and San Pedro. Although names of individuals involved in such trafficking have been cited, no arrest has been made.

22. The following cases reflect trends of sexual violence against children:

(a) On 17 November 2005 a 15-year-old girl was reportedly raped in a neighbourhood in Belville II, Bouaké. The child was among five girls who confirmed to human rights officers that they were employed as dancers and prostitutes in the neighbourhood;

(b) On 18 December 2005 a 17-year-old girl was reportedly sexually assaulted in Guiglo by nine unidentified men. No progress has been reported on the investigation opened by the gendarmerie;

(c) On 5 March 2006 a 15-year-old girl was repeatedly raped in Alépé by an element of the Centre de commandement des operations sécuritaires. An investigation has been opened by the gendarmerie, but no progress has been reported;

(d) The United Nations registered deep concerns with the leadership of FAFN over the rape in March 2006 of a 14-year-old girl in Bouaké while she was being held in FAFN custody. The case led to the issuance of an FAFN command order to end child detention, cited in section VI below;

(e) On 26 June 2006 UNOCI human rights officers reported the alleged rape of a 15-year-old schoolgirl in Danané by a member of FAFN. A staff member of the school informed UNOCI that incidents of rape were rampant in the school, but parents preferred to stay silent for fear of reprisals.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

23. During the period under review there was no systematic denial of humanitarian access for children by parties to the conflict.

IV. Establishment of monitoring and reporting mechanism

24. Significant progress has been made in establishing a monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in Côte d'Ivoire pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). Over the past year, among the United Nations partners on the ground, planning and preparation for the establishment of the mechanism and the implementation of other aspects of the resolution have taken place in the framework of the protection network of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Coordination Committee. In September 2006 the National Task Force on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism was established, comprised primarily of United Nations entities of the protection network. The Task Force is co-chaired by my Deputy Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire and the UNICEF Country Representative, with the mandate to oversee progress in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005). The Task Force is responsible for the submission of bimonthly and annual reports on grave violations for consideration by the Security Council. In addition, UNICEF established a child protection forum in February 2006 comprising the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and operational international child protection non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which, in conjunction with the protection network, will collaborate with the Task Force.

25. The UNOCI child protection adviser has established a systematic briefing and training programme for the UNOCI military, police and civilian sections in order to prime the peacekeeping operation to contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanism. This has entailed the dissemination of and briefings on the provisions of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and more specific training on child protection, including information-gathering on and verification of the six grave violations set out in paragraph 1. In this regard, specific child protection focal points have been appointed among peacekeeping contingents, United Nations military observers, United Nations police and UNOCI human rights officers to liaise with the child protection adviser on the collection of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on grave violations. The information gathered by UNOCI sources is screened and classified in a database to facilitate tracking and follow-up of cases. Under the UNOCI budget for 2006/07, it is anticipated that 10 national child protection officers and 4 United Nations volunteer child protection officers will be recruited to support efforts in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), augmenting the Child Protection Section, which presently consists of the child protection adviser and one internationally recruited child protection officer.

26. UNICEF continues to brief partner NGOs on Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), as well as the Ministry of Family, militia groups and the FAFN leadership. UNICEF has also supported training workshops for 42 designated FAFN focal points and local national NGOs responsible for programme implementation. UNICEF presently has two international protection officers, one of whom works exclusively on the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as five national

child protection officers. UNICEF is in the process of establishing a West Africa regional information management system in collaboration with UNHCR, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee, which will focus on cross-border monitoring of incidents of violations of children's rights.

V. Progress on dialogue with parties to conflict

A. Dialogue with the armed forces of the Forces nouvelles on an action plan to end the use of child soldiers

27. Upon the adoption by the Security Council of its resolution 1612 (2005) in July 2005, the UNOCI Child Protection Section notified all components of the mission and advised relevant peacekeeping personnel to disseminate information on the resolution as well as resolution 1539 (2004) with commanders of FAFN, FANCI and pro-Government militia groups. On 22 August 2005 UNOCI held a meeting with representatives of FAFN in Bouaké, during which they were reminded that the use of child soldiers had prompted the inclusion of FAFN on the list of violators annexed to my report of 9 February 2005 (A/59/695-S/2005/72). Copies of the report were handed over to FAFN, which was also advised that under the provisions of the above-mentioned resolutions, the Council had requested the preparation and implementation, without delay, of a time-bound action plan to halt the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It was stressed that the action plan must be implemented in full collaboration with the United Nations presence in Côte d'Ivoire. The FAFN leadership committed to full compliance with Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1539 (2004). Subsequent dialogue with UNOCI and UNICEF, with the active participation of UNICEF headquarters and the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, resulted in the submission on 26 November 2005 of a comprehensive action plan by the leadership of FAFN to my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire committing them to ending the association of children with their fighting forces.

28. Under the action plan, FAFN has committed to: (a) ending the use of child soldiers and releasing all children within their ranks; (b) cooperating with the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme on children's issues; (c) carrying out specific measures to prevent the recruitment of children; (d) designating a high-level focal point to liaise with the United Nations team during the implementation of the action plan; (e) defining time-bound benchmarks for measuring progress and compliance; (f) issuing formal instructions through their chain of command that reflect commitments contained in the action plan; and (g) providing access for the United Nations to verify progress in the implementation of the action plan.

29. The leadership of FAFN has since formally reconfirmed its commitment to my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire and to fully cooperate in completing the implementation of the action plan and to hand over all demobilized children to UNICEF in order to ensure adequate care and the necessary follow-up in coordination with the national disarmament demobilization and reintegration programme. On 1 July 2006 the FAFN leadership submitted a report to my Special Representative outlining actions taken towards full implementation of the action plan. In the report, General Soumaila Bakayoko declared that there were no more

children associated with fighting forces in the military zones of Bouaké and Katiola and that efforts were ongoing to identify and hand over to UNICEF children associated with their fighting forces in the remaining eight military zones under the control of the Forces nouvelles. General Bakayoko has requested UNOCI to refer to him directly any information on the reassociation of children with the fighting forces in Bouaké and Katiola for prompt action. In his report, the General also emphasized the constraints in identifying and demobilizing children beyond Bouaké, Katiola and Man owing to a lack of resources to extend the process into the remaining seven zones under his control.

30. A verification mechanism is in the process of being established by UNOCI and UNICEF to ascertain compliance. The UNICEF-led Verification Commission will commence visits to Bouaké and Katiola in October 2006, and UNOCI will complement the work of the Commission through the continued daily monitoring activities of military observers, United Nations police and the Human Rights Division, under the guidance of the UNOCI Child Protection Section.

B. Dialogue with militias on an action plan to end the use of child soldiers

31. With the exception of armed civil defence groups in the west and GPP in Abidjan, it is not known how many militia groups are operational in areas under the control of the Government. Where groups may be suspected of recruiting and using children, as is the case in San Pedro, for instance, the establishment of a viable dialogue in the framework of the resolutions of the Security Council on children and armed conflict has been hampered by the difficulties inherent in identifying the chain of command. Efforts to successfully identify militia groups, specify their chains of command and establish dialogue with them towards prevention of recruitment and use of children requires commitment and backing by the Government and FPI.

32. The national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme has agreed with UNOCI and UNICEF on the need to ensure purposeful engagement with militia groups for the preparation and implementation of action plans to end the recruitment and use of children as an adequate framework for effective demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of children. The programme has played a leading role in the dialogue with militia groups, particularly since the attacks against United Nations personnel in January 2006, which made it more difficult for such personnel to function in the west. The programme has made it explicitly clear to the leaders of the militia groups that disarmament negotiations must include child-specific provisions in application of Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005). To date, the programme has identified and listed 100 children formerly associated with the militia groups and provided this information to UNICEF to ensure adequate support for those children. Eleven other children were identified among 980 militias disarmed in Guiglo during the month of August.

33. A joint initiative of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, UNOCI and UNICEF has resulted in a commitment to an action plan by four militia groups in the west of Côte d'Ivoire, namely, FLGO, APWE, UPRGO

and MILOCI. On 14 September those groups formally signed the action plan, addressed to the Prime Minister and my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire.

34. Under the plan the four militia groups agreed: (a) to release all children within their ranks; (b) to cooperate with the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme on children's issues; (c) to take specific measures to prevent the recruitment of children; (d) to designate a high-level focal point to liaise with the United Nations team and the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme during the implementation of the action plan; (e) to define time-bound benchmarks in consultation with the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, UNOCI and UNICEF for measuring progress and compliance; (f) to issue formal instructions through their chain of command reflecting commitments contained in the action plan; and (g) to allow unhindered access by the United Nations team and the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme for monitoring and verification.

35. It should be noted that although the militia groups acknowledge the fact that children may be associated with their forces in different capacities, they deny actively recruiting child soldiers.

36. Furthermore, it should be noted that these action plans by FAFN and militia groups in territories under Government control are the first such action plans to be negotiated by the United Nations under the explicit framework established by the Security Council under resolution 1612 (2005), and as such should be afforded due consideration for lessons learned and best practices. It will now be critical to ensure that the commitments that have been made by the parties to the conflict begin to translate into tangible protection for children on the ground.

VI. Follow-up and programmatic response

37. As the leading child-protection agency in Côte d'Ivoire, UNICEF has placed particular emphasis and focus on its interventions for the protection of vulnerable children, advocacy for the prevention of recruitment of children by armed forces and groups and monitoring and reporting of grave children's rights violations. UNICEF has actively sought to engage with the parties to the conflict and to elicit commitments from them to end recruitment and to release children associated with fighting forces and groups. These efforts over the past several years have been an important foundation for the most recent dialogue, which has resulted in the concrete achievement of action plans by the parties to the conflict.

38. In pursuing its operational mandate, UNICEF has collaborated closely with other United Nations agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, that undertake child-related programming under the purview of their own mandates and responsibilities. UNICEF advocates with partners to ensure mainstreaming and prioritization of children's concerns in their activities. In addition, the close collaboration of UNICEF with relevant child-protection experts within UNOCI has yielded significant results in terms of critical child protection priorities established by UNICEF. Ensuring and fostering complementarity of efforts remains a critical priority.

39. To date, demobilization and reintegration activities have been implemented in areas controlled by both the Forces nouvelles and the Government. Creating protective community spaces and providing psychosocial support to help children to recover over time have been an important priority. A total of 4,718 internally displaced children have benefited from psychosocial programming, including recreational and educational activities, as well as health interventions in areas controlled by the Forces nouvelles and the Government and in the zone of confidence.

40. UNICEF currently facilitates the rehabilitation and reintegration of 1,194 ex-child soldiers and other vulnerable children in these areas. Moreover, a separate programme is in progress to support 600 self-demobilized children in Danané who received military training during the conflict from pro-FAFN Liberian fighters. Meanwhile, in territories under Government control, 400 children formerly associated with militia groups in the west (Guiglo) continue to benefit from UNICEF-sponsored programmes. The UNICEF rehabilitation and reintegration plan for 2006 targets 3,000 ex-child soldiers and other vulnerable children (including 800 girls) affected by the conflict in areas under the control of FAFN and militia groups. The financial support pledged by the Work Bank for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme will be of significant assistance in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with fighting forces. It is anticipated that out of the $90,308,291 committed by the World Bank for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, $2,702,955 is earmarked for children associated with fighting forces. Out of the total $596,742 of UNDP funds allocated to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration by the Government of Norway, $143,413 is devoted to child soldiers and other children affected by the conflict in support of UNICEF programming. Furthermore, other UNDP funds allocated to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration by the European Union/Commission since 2004 take into account the equipment and functioning of two transit and orientation centres for youths and child soldiers in Man and Bouaké in terms of supplying food and non-food items in the amount of $366,744.

41. UNICEF is developing advocacy and training activities to prevent, protect and rehabilitate child victims of sexual violence. There are a number of critical challenges for effective programming for children in this regard, including inadequate redeployment of qualified social services personnel; a lack of reliable and disaggregated data on vulnerable groups in areas controlled by the Government and the Forces nouvelles; and difficulties in developing with partners an integrated and coordinated response. UNOCI and UNICEF continue to advocate concertedly with relevant authorities to rigorously investigate and prosecute rape and other grave sexual violations against children to redress the prevailing sense of impunity of perpetrators.

42. UNOCI has strongly advocated that FAFN address the serious concern of detention of large numbers of children in areas under their control. As a result, the leadership of FAFN issued a command order on 30 April 2006 instructing an immediate end to the detention of children in areas under their control, pending the restoration of the administration of justice. The command order made exceptions for murder, rape and armed robbery allegedly perpetrated by children. With regard to such cases, the competent agencies and non-governmental organizations would be alerted and consulted for advice. Also, where children are suspected of recidivism for minor offences or serious antisocial behaviour, a case file will be shared with

competent agencies and non-governmental organizations for their advice and intervention. To implement this commitment by FAFN, the command order has been broadly disseminated to United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and UNOCI human rights officers, military observers, United Nations police and rule of law/prison officers for reference and advocacy for release of children during monitoring activities. The implementation of this command order will be an important stopgap measure of protection for children in areas under the control of FAFN, even as the need to restore administrative justice systems remains a critical priority.

43. With regard to the destruction and deterioration of education infrastructure as a result of the conflict, the UNICEF education programme, which is focusing on ensuring access to education for children, has also included support for the physical rehabilitation of schools. UNICEF will support 107 school rehabilitation projects through 2006. In response to this critical situation and a strong appeal from the Ivorian School Management Committees, UNOCI in 2004/05 spent 35 per cent ($260,000) of its quick-impact project budget on the rehabilitation of buildings, benefiting 24 schools. In the budget year 2005/06, the quick-impact project commitment was increased to $389,893 to benefit 36 rehabilitation projects in the education sector.

44. UNICEF has also collaborated with partners in other important interventions for children, including in the area of nutrition. In December 2005 WFP was assisting 10,000 orphans and other vulnerable children, including former child soldiers. WFP also administered a selected feeding programme that benefited approximately 4,000 malnourished children and pregnant and lactating women. WFP currently supports 12,690 beneficiaries with family rations, of which 2,538 are orphans and the remainder are vulnerable children in families. A further 4,520 orphans and vulnerable children in institutions are being assisted. Therapeutic and supplementary feeding activities are benefiting 2,885 malnourished children and 600 caretakers of children in therapeutic feeding centres. Some 1,650 pregnant and lactating women are supported through mother and child health activities. WFP is also providing school feeding rations to about 565,000 children during the 2005/06 school year. UNICEF has also supported the rehabilitation of 28 health structures and is planning to upgrade another 113 health centres throughout the country.

45. In regard to child trafficking, it should be noted that the Government of Côte d'Ivoire has taken important steps towards addressing this issue by playing a lead role in the adoption of a multilateral agreement against trafficking in children, signed by nine countries in the subregion, on 27 July 2005. A regional commission has also been established in Abidjan to follow up on the implementation of the agreement, which will contribute to more effective protection of children.

VII. Recommendations

46. I am deeply concerned by the grave violations being committed with impunity against children in Côte d'Ivoire, and I call upon all parties to the conflict to abide by the applicable international obligations for the protection of children. I call upon all parties to the conflict to encourage social cohesion among ethnic groups and communities, the ongoing conflict among them is taking a tremendous toll on the

lives and well-being of children and preventing the voluntary return of internally displaced persons to their homes.

47. I welcome the commitment by FAFN to a concrete, time-bound action plan to end use of child soldiers in compliance with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), commend FAFN for its full cooperation with the United Nations to identify and release children associated with their fighting forces and to put in place measures to prevent the recruitment of children in Bouaké and Katiola and stress the importance of FAFN ensuring the implementation of similar measures in the remaining military zones under their control.

48. I also welcome the recent signing of action plans to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by a number of pro-Government militia groups in western Côte d'Ivoire (FLGO, APWE, UPRGO and MILOCI) and stress the importance of those groups continuing to cooperate fully with the United Nations to implement the action plans without delay. I also call upon the Government and FPI to support the United Nations in identifying other pro-Government militia groups and their chains of command in order to establish dialogue towards the preparation and implementation of similar action plans by them. I urge UNICEF and other United Nations entities, together with relevant national institutions such as the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, to ensure adequate provision of support and programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all released children.

49. Furthermore, it should be noted that these action plans to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by FAFN and militia groups in territories under Government control are among the first such action plans to be negotiated by the United Nations under the explicit framework established in Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). As such I urge relevant United Nations actors in Côte d'Ivoire to report to the Security Council on lessons learned and best practices in this regard.

50. I am deeply disturbed by the prevailing culture of impunity for grave violations against children, especially sexual violence against girls. I urge the Government and the Forces nouvelles to ensure the rigorous and timely investigation of incidents and the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against children. I call upon the international community and the Security Council to take concrete and targeted measures against parties and individuals who systematically commit such grave violations against children.

51. I am deeply concerned by the absence of a system for the administration of justice in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles and invite all parties to conflict to expedite the peace process and restore State authority across the country. As a stopgap measure for the protection of children, I welcome the decision by FAFN to issue a command order calling for an end to the illegal detention of children in areas under their control and the timely referral of alleged cases of serious crimes by children or repeat offences to relevant child protection authorities.

52. I commend the progress of UNOCI, UNICEF and other United Nations partners in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in Côte d'Ivoire, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution 1612 (2005). I urge continued close collaboration of all relevant actors to determine and agree on a division of responsibilities in order to meet the

challenges for full implementation of the mechanism and response to violations as a matter of priority. I encourage relevant non-governmental organization partners and national authorities to collaborate with the United Nations in monitoring, reporting and response as appropriate.

53. I call upon the international community, and donors in particular, to provide adequate and timely assistance for programmes of rehabilitation and reintegration of all children associated with fighting forces in Côte d'Ivoire so as to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of such efforts and to support especially national initiatives in this regard.

54. I encourage my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire to continue to give close and special attention to the plight of children and to advocate concertedly for the implementation of and compliance with the resolutions of the Security Council on children and armed conflict.